

A Book Review on  
Mere Christianity

Nathaniel B Parker  
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Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. New York: Collier Books, 1960. Pp 266.

**Introduction**

How does an individual determine morality? How can one gain a simple yet solid understanding of the Christian faith? How can one even begin to grasp mysterious Christian doctrines such as the doctrine of the Trinity? All of these questions are answered in the classic by C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. Beginning as a series of oral lectures presented over the radio when the United Kingdom was suffering from the ravages of World War I, C.S. Lewis outlined for listeners, and presents for readers, a clear and simple understanding of the Christian faith and morality.

**Author**

C.S. Lewis was “one of the most widely read authors on Christian teaching in the Western world”.<sup>1</sup> He was educated with a tutor, later attending Malvern College and University College (Oxford), only to have his education interrupted by World War I. He later taught at Oxford and Cambridge as an English and classics scholar. He was also well-known as a Christian apologist. His works include: *The Allegory of Love: a Study in Medieval Tradition*, *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, *The Problem of Pain*, *Miracles*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*.<sup>2</sup>

**Topic and Scope**

Lewis presents a broad yet structured scope in *Mere Christianity*. He divides his material

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<sup>1</sup> *Compton’s Encyclopedia: Noet Edition* (Chicago, IL: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2015), Lewis, C.S.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

into four “books”. Book 1 deals with the natural law as the foundation of morality. Lewis makes readers aware of the importance of the natural law, the origination of the natural law from a supreme natural law giver (ultimately, God), as well as he addresses common objections to the natural law such as a distinction between the natural law and mere human instinct.

Book 2 transitions readers to a discussion on some of the core beliefs in the Christian faith. Lewis lays a foundation for the Christian’s belief in God and why even though a good God originally created the earth to be good, the earth still suffers in an evil and corrupted state in the present age. He presents a solid treatment on the nature of free will. Lewis teaches readers that while free will makes evil a possibility, it is also a necessity for making real love and joy possible as well.

After laying the foundation on Christian belief in book 2, book 3 practically fleshes out morality and Christian behavior. Lewis begins with offering three principles for morality: harmony between human beings, harmony inside each human being, and the overall purpose in life human beings were created for. He goes onto discuss what he refers to as the “cardinal virtues”: prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude.<sup>3</sup> Lewis continues by digging into specific moral discussions on marriage, sexuality, charity, forgiveness, hope, and faith.

The final book (book 4) from Lewis touches on an introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity. Lewis offers a distinction between creating and begetting from a biblical standpoint with regard to the Trinity. He also articulates a discussion on the three persons of the Trinity. He concludes with a overview of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and how salvation transforms individuals who place their faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Thesis**

The goal of Lewis in *Mere Christianity* was to present a solid and biblically sound, yet clear, simple, and understandable, presentation of morality and the core beliefs of the Christian

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<sup>3</sup>. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Paperback ed. (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1960), 76.

faith. Lewis originally delivered these presentations over radio (which is why each chapter is easily digestible) to listeners in the United Kingdom suffering the calamity of World War I. He dispenses of overly technical and theological language to present listeners (and later readers) with as clear and understandable of a discussion on the Christian faith as possible. With World War I bringing suffering and devastation to the United Kingdom, listeners (and readers) were hungry for hope and truth. This hope and truth can only be found through Jesus Christ. Lewis effectively delivers this message on all fronts.

The discussion Lewis presents in book 1 concerning the natural law is an excellent and well-organized foundation of morality. Before Lewis transitions into specifics concerning the Christian faith and Christian morality, he grounds his discussions on the natural law as well as the ultimate natural law giver, God. This understanding of the natural law presented by Lewis is as needed for modern readers who have rejected the natural law as it was for listeners during World War I. The distinction made by Lewis concerning the natural law and one's human instincts clearly articulates the difference and allows readers to better understand the importance of the natural law in society.

As Lewis shifts to a discussion concerning core Christian beliefs in book 2, he lays a solid foundation for the person and goodness of God and how the Christian belief of God varies with other world religions. He goes on to articulate that God created the world to be good, yet the world has been corrupted into an evil state. The reasoning behind this is not due to God's creation, but due to human's rejection of God through their free will. Lewis underscores that while free will permits evil to exist, it is also necessary to allow true love and joy to exist. He goes on to explain that while humans have a free will to choose whether to accept or reject the goodness of God, God's ultimate design for humans was to be in fellowship with Him.

The discussion Lewis presents concerning Christian behavior and morality in book 3 drills down to specific moral and ethical behaviors from a Christian standpoint. Again Lewis does not disappoint. His statements concerning the principles of morality and the "cardinal virtues" solidify the foundation of Christian morality in the minds of listeners (and readers). He

extends the discussion on morality to humans interacting socially with other humans, presenting a biblical defense of marriage and sexuality, as well as underscoring the importance of forgiveness in the Christian life. He concludes with an exposition on love, hope, and faith, the three great principles of Paul's epistle to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 13.

The most challenging portion of *Mere Christianity* was the discussion Lewis presents in book 4 concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. Trying to clearly and simply articulate such an immensely intriguing doctrine is difficult for even seasoned theologians. Yet Lewis clearly distinguishes between the creative acts of the Godhead and the Son being begotten from the Father, refuting Arian theology well. His overview of the three persons of the Trinity is concise yet doctrinally sound. Lewis also ensure listeners (and readers) understand the practicalities of the doctrine of the Trinity and the Christian faith. His final presentations on salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and the transformation it places in the life of the individual were clear and brought *Mere Christianity* to an excellent conclusion. He illustrates that one only fully understands one's life when one places their faith in Jesus Christ as the ultimate "personality".<sup>4</sup> Apart from Jesus Christ, one cannot experience the fullness of life.

### **Overall Evaluation**

Every Christian should read *Mere Christianity* for a number of reasons. First, *Mere Christianity* is a classic by C.S. Lewis that every Christian should be familiar with. Second, the discussion Lewis presents concerning the natural law is desperately needed in modern society that has basically rejected any form of natural law and its importance. Lewis makes it crystal clear the vital need of the natural law as the foundation to morality. The discussion Lewis presents concerning natural law, as well as Christian behavior and morality, is also beneficial to those needing a deeper understanding of Christian ethics from one of the leading Christian apologists of the World War I era. For those needing a simple yet biblically sound discussion of

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<sup>4</sup>. Lewis, 225.

Christian doctrines and the doctrine of the Trinity, as well as those involved in theological studies, *Mere Christianity* delivers on this front as well. New Christians can especially benefit from the simple presentation of the Christian faith as outlined by Lewis, and even non-Christians should read *Mere Christianity* to gain an overview of the Christian faith and Christian morality, culminating in a solid salvation invitation to faith in Jesus Christ. This classic by C.S. Lewis benefited listeners in the United Kingdom during World War I, and its timeless message is as timely and needed for modern society as it was then. It is a message that continues to speak volumes to readers of every generation.

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